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ABSTRACT

An attempt was initiated at a small teacher training college in rural Pennsylvania to combine in a developmental psychology class traditional course material and dyadic communications skills training. Twice a week there were meetings in a large lecture hall where the lectures were geared toward topics in child development; once a week small groups met to learn communications and human relations skills which were then implemented and practiced in dyadic fashion during subsequent small-group meetings. It was explained to the students that in no way would any judgments be made regarding the quality of their dyadic interpretations but that points would be earned solely on the basis of participation. Grading for the entire course was determined on a partly traditional, partly self-motivated basis: points were received on the basis of tests; points were earned by special projects; and students could assign 10 percent of their own academic grade by defining in essay fashion their own academic criteria and how well they adhered to that criteria. (The course content and the dyadic experience are described in detail.) (JA)

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COMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT - COMPATIBLE GROWTH

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If the humanistic psychology movement in our colleges and universities is to flourish it cannot be perceived as totally distinct or separate from the more traditional curriculum offerings in education and psychology departments. Indeed, it would seem that meaningful intergration must be demonstrated for both schools of thought to service. The authors have had the opportunity to attempt such a consolidation in a small teacher training college in rural Pennsylvania and have encountered an enthusiastic response from the 400 students who have been exposed to it thus far. For the most part these were first and second term freshman who had not had previous exposure to collegiate psychology, humanistic or otherwise. Felker (1973) recently described a series of growth experiences for college freshman which was distinct from course offerings. The present paper will attempt to demonstrate the manner in which a traditional course can also become a growth experience.

The Structure

The course to be described was called Developmental Psychology I. Although the traditional catalogue title retained the course was quite different from the typical child development course. Two-hundred students were enrolled per semester under a structure which provided for twice weekly en masse meetings in a large lecture hall and once a week meetings in small groups of approximately twenty students to a group. The large lectures were geared toward topics in

child development; although, as will be shown later, there were some departures and omissions from the more traditional conceptualizations of such a course. The small groups met to learn communications and human relations skills which were then implemented and practiced in dyadic fashion during subsequent small group meeting times. Keeping the segments separate was not a hard and fast rule -- at times a large group lecture would be presented which pertained to some human relations/communications concept and at times the topics for dyadic interaction in the small group meeting hour were generated by child development subject matter which had been presented earlier in the large group lecture.

Attendance was not mandatory for the large lectures, but points toward a final grade could be earned for participatory attendance in the small groups. It was explained to the students that in no way would any judgments be made regarding the quality of their dyadic interactions but that points would be earned solely on the basis of participating. It was further explained that such a point system was an incentive to keep an attendance commitment with one's dyadic partner, since if one person did not attend the dyadic partner would not be able to participate for that day either.

Grading for the entire course was determined on a partly traditional, partly self-motivated way. In addition to a maximum of twenty points earned for small group attendance, three multiple choice tests worth twenty points each

and based solely on lecture material were administered. Ten additional points were earned by choosing to keep a "Feelings Diary" or doing a mini self-analysis through the application of transactional analysis principles. Complete confidentiality was offered regarding both assignments and the twenty points were automatic; that is, no subjective instructor evaluation would take place. Finally, students could assign ten percent of their own grade by defining in essay fashion their own academic criteria and then specifically defining how well they had adhered to those criteria. The instructor was free to disagree with students' self-estimations, but it was agreed in advance that the outcome could not be changed by the instructor. Thus, one-hundred points were possible and ultimately grades were scaled.

The Teaching of Communications and Human Relations Skills

The course began with the instructor demonstrating the typical and generally ineffective communication styles employed daily by people. This was based on Gordon (1970) and Gazda (1973) and demonstrated experientially through role play (or real life situations) between the instructor and student volunteers.

Next, and in a relatively elementary way, the basic philosophies of both Rogers and Carkhuff were discussed with particular emphasis being placed upon the realistic extent to which Carkhuffian goals for an interpersonal relationship might be achieved in fifteen weeks in an academic

setting.

Since the dyadic interaction that the students would soon be participating in involved one person being in a "speaker" modality for some length of time, emphasis was then placed on the concepts and research regarding self-disclosure, based largely on Jourard (1964). As an adjunct to this, the concept of owning feelings and giving "I messages" a la Gordon (1970) was also discussed and then practiced via worksheets.

Once this preliminary and basic work was completed, students were taught a highly structured communications skills approach for discussing topics within their dyads. This model, called Dyadic Relationship Enhancement (DRE), was developed by Dr. Bernard Guerney and was most recently described in an article by Ely, Guerney & Stover (1973). This model was first devised for use by married couples and has since been adapted by Guerney and several of his associates to facilitate communication among dating couples (Schlein, 1973), fathers and sons (Ginsberg, 1971), and high school students (Hatch and Guerney, 1974), to name but a few. Inherent to this model is a structured and systematic approach which combines elements of Rogerian and Skinnerian methods and makes extensive use of demonstration and leader modeling. An "empathic responder" modality is the complement to the "speaker" modality in the DRE model, and there are clearly structured guidelines for both modalities.

The Dyadic Experience

Students in each small group were given the opportunity

to choose a dyadic partner for the fifteen-week experience. It was explained that they would probably get to know this person quite well during that time period, and approximately 20% of the participants made such self-motivated choices. The others were paired by the instructor. Male-female pairs constituted about 75% of the dyads, and the rest were same-sex pairs. (Feedback received at the end of the course indicated that several people would have preferred an option to seek a new partner halfway through. A few of these were dyads that just didn't "click," but the majority of people who suggested this option felt that the experience would have been a good one to share with more than one person).

One of the primary rules of the DRE "speaker" modality is that the speaker is always free to address a topic of her or his own choice. It is then suggested that the speaker basically try to address the topic in terms of feelings as opposed to content. There is, of course, wide variation in peoples' ability to do this with comfortability and these freshman were no exception. Therefore we were advantageously able to meet some dyads' need for something to talk about by suggesting topics which were based on newly learned knowledge and concepts dealt with in the large lectures. However, the option was always left open to choose a topic of one's own choice. The list of suggested topics was potentially endless and limited only by the instructor's degree of creativity. Some typical examples included the concept of prejudice, one's reaction to authority figures, sibling rivalry, I.Q. and parental expectations, attitudes toward disabled people,

and male-female role expectations and stereotypes. Introspective topics for the speaker were also encouraged via lectures regarding Erikson's seven stages. Therefore, in addition to the development of human relations skills, dyadic interchanges dealing with many of the above served to develop personal meaning and significance which in more traditional psychology courses would remain strictly theoretical. Not surprisingly, a particularly meaningful topic of concern for the first term freshman was that of separation anxiety since many of them were away from home for the first time. When students chose their own topics rather than those suggested, they tended to discuss present concerns, e.g., dating relationships, academic problems, roommate problems, etc.

In Retrospect

The ability of the vast majority of freshman to quickly learn and adhere to the DRE model was astonishing. In comparison to other groups with whom the authors have worked, this group had the least difficulty in learning the model and not deviating from it. It may be that their relative lack of psychological "sophistication" was an advantage in this regard. Also, the initial feelings of satisfaction generated by successful interpersonal interaction surely had a role in the facilitation and retention of the learning that took place. That the skills were not thoroughly learned and practiced in all cases was a function of the fact that one instructor constantly had to "float" in facilitating

ten dyads at a time. A continued endeavor of this sort could be strengthened by developing supervisory skills with students who had already learned and practiced the DRE model. They could then assist in a facilitative role in subsequent classes.

This program was as rewarding to the instructors as it was to the students. Many lasting relationships were formed and much meaningful dialogue was generated by the people who took part in this experience. Both oral and written evaluations to the instructors indicated a very high degree of positive regard for the program. Due to the success of the program, it has been incorporated as a permanent part of the curriculum. Subjective factors alone have indicated considerable success using this approach. However, one of the criticisms often levelled at humanistic psychology is a lack of precise measurement. In an attempt to gather objective data, evaluation of the program will continue via the use of several objective measurement techniques. Current plans include, for example, the use of Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory. Findings based on research data will be reported at a later date.

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